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question of the decipherment of the mysterious hieroglyphs of Yucatan was broached, but it was agreed that little progress had been made in this attractive branch of archæology.

One gratifying fact must be recorded to the credit of those who assisted in this congress. So many antiquaries have made themselves and their study ridiculous by absurd theories, that one always has a dread that this fate will overtake an assemblage of the kind. To be sure, there were a few threatening symptoms of such an outbreak. The Celtomaniac was heard from who wanted to identify some American language with the Welsh, the ancient Atlantis was not wholly submerged out of sight, and the missionary journey of the Apostle St. Thomas to Mexico in A. D. 50 would come up for a little while; but the good sense of the majority soon suppressed these wasters of time.

The occasion was a fine one for practice in languages. The congress has no official tongue, and though most of the proceedings were in French the papers and debates were alternately in that language and in German, English, Spanish and Danish. The sessions closed with an excursion in the picturesque landscapes around Copenhagen, and it is safe to say that every member of the body returned to his home enriched with information on the subject of his studies, and with a sentiment of warm friendliness to the hospitable and intelligent Danish people.

The next meeting of the congress will be at Turin, in 1885.—*D. G. B.*

MICROSCOPY.¹

METHODS OF PREVENTING THE ROLLING OF MICROTOMIC SECTIONS.—The section-smoother described in the last number of the *NATURALIST* appears to be the best instrument yet devised for the prevention of section-rolling, not excepting the ingenious device of Schulze, described below.

Besides the section-smoother, there are other means by which the rolling of sections may be prevented. It may be effected by rendering the paraffine softer and less elastic through the addition of a small quantity of vaseline, by the aid of brush or spatula held over the object by the left hand during the process of cutting, and lastly—and most effectively—by placing the knife at right angles to the carrier. The discovery of the fact that sections may be cut without rolling by giving the knife a transverse instead of an oblique position, was made by Mr. Caldwell, and at about the same time by Professor Mark. Since the discovery of this method, it has come very rapidly into general use, and now Jung's microtome is supplied with "transverse" as well as "oblique knives." This method, excellent as it is, especially with small objects, does not suffice in all cases, and does not therefore remove the necessity of a section-smoother. Even with the

¹ Edited by Dr. C. O. WHITMAN, Mus. Comparative Zoology, Cambridge, Mass.

knife placed transversely, the section-smoother may often be used with advantage, and sometimes proves indispensable.

In this method it is important to use a moderately soft paraffine, which may be obtained by mixing, in proper proportions, soft and hard paraffine, and further to give the piece of paraffine to be cut a rectangular form. The piece must then be so placed in the holder that the side next to the knife is exactly parallel with the cutting edge. Thus placed, every section lies flat on the blade. The second section pushes on the first, adhering to its adjoining side; the third pushes on the first two, adhering to the second. A whole ribbon of sections may be cut in this way in a few moments without danger of losing their serial order. Thus three very important points are gained: the sections remain perfectly flat, the cutting may be as rapid as the hand can move, and the order of the sections is preserved without trouble to the manipulator. Care must be taken only that the opposite sides of the paraffine are parallel, otherwise the ribbon will curve to the right or left, and the arrangement of the sections on the slide be less easily accomplished.

SCHULZE'S SECTION-SMOOTHER.¹—This contrivance consists of a small weight supported by a steel spring. The weight (*w*) which

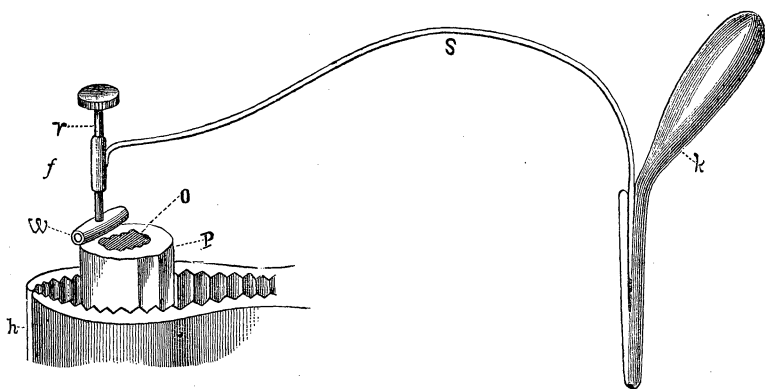


FIG. 1.—Section-smoother adjusted to a block of paraffine (*p*) preparatory to cutting; *o*, the object; *h*, paraffine-holder; *s*, steel spring; *w*, weight.

has the form of a cylinder, is about 8^{mm} in length, and is fixed to the lower end of an upright rod which can be turned about its longer axis, or moved up or down in a ferrule (*f*), as may be seen from the figure. One end of the spring (*s*) supporting the weight is soldered to the ferrule; the other end is held fast in the holder (*k*), one arm of which is prolonged into an enlarged handle-like portion. The holder (*k*)

¹ Franz Eilhard Schulze. Ein Schmittstreckker. *Zool. Anzeiger*, vi, No. 132, p. 100.

fits into a cylindrical hole which penetrates perpendicularly to a depth of $2-3^{\text{mm}}$ the hinder portion of the object-carrier. Within this hole the holder can be turned, or moved up or down; and these movements, together with those which may be given to the rod (r) and the spring (s), are ample for all adjustments of the weight (w).

Preparatory to cutting, the weight should be turned so as to be parallel with the edge of the knife, and raised or lowered by means of the rod (r) and the holder (k) until it rests *lightly* on the upper surface of the paraffine. Slight changes in the pressure of the weight can be made through the rod (r); greater changes can be effected by bending the spring.

The weight should rest, not directly over the object, but on the edge of the paraffine next to the knife.

This section-smoother, which can be fitted to any sliding microtome, can be obtained of Fr. Fasching, in Graz, Bürgergasse, No. 13, at a price of $3\frac{1}{2}$ marks, or \$0.85.

—:o:—

SCIENTIFIC NEWS.

— SOME GOSSIP ABOUT DARWIN.—In a recent visit to England, the writer strolled into the village of Down in Kent, and talked with some of the villagers in regard to Mr. Darwin, whose beautiful home is just outside the little town.

Some of this talk, although in itself idle and valueless, may have an interest to readers, as showing how a great man looks to his smaller neighbors.

The landlord of the "George Inn" said that "all the people wished to have Mr. Darwin buried in Down, but the government would not let them. It would have helped the place so much. It would have brought hosts of people down to see his grave. Especially it would have helped the hotel business which is pretty dull in winter time.

"Mr. Darwin was a very fine-looking man. He had a high forehead and wore a long beard. Still, if you had met him on the street, perhaps, you would not have taken much notice of him unless you knew that he was a clever man."

"Sir John Lubbock (Darwin's friend and near neighbor) is a very clever man, too, but not so clever nor so remarkable-looking as Mr. Darwin. He is very fond of hants (ants) and plants and things."

At Keston, three miles from Down, the landlady of the Greyhound had never heard of Mr. Darwin until after his death. There was then considerable talk about his being buried in Westminster, but nothing was said of him before.

Several persons had considerable to say of Mr. Darwin's extensive and judicious charity to the poor. To Mr. Parslow, for